

CLINTON HILL NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL
26 Stanley Avenue
Newark 8 New Jersey

February 13, 1960

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT

To: All Council leaders.
From: Stanley B. Winters, president.

1. As you know, in the past three or four months the Council has become increasingly concerned about the role it will play in the Lower Clinton Hill Urban Renewal Project. The Council's ~~work~~ activities and program from early 1956 onward were a key factor in Clinton Hill's designation as a Conservation and Rehabilitation Area in the first place. But in the past year, and especially in the past few months, it seemed as if all the planning and key decisions were being made, and would continue to be made, without Council (or community) participation.

Such decisions would include the utilization of open space in the renewal area (such as the big lot above Seymour Ave. which our actions saved for the neighborhood); the design of street dividers to implement onway traffic; the timetables of project construction; the tempo of inspections and enforcement of repairs which such inspections reveal as necessary, and other items.

2. The Council leaders made known their concern through correspondence with key planning officials in City Hall, and several meetings were held at which time (last December and January) we presented 5 proposals for ~~strengthening~~ strengthening citizen-participation in decision-making: 1) setting up an effective liaison committee (including Clinton Hill Council and community leaders, and city officials) to cooperatively pass on plans and proposals; 2) holding area-wide meetings to inform all residents on the status of the Renewal program, to hear suggestions, and to answer questions and spread information on the plan; 3) having block-branches meet with key planning personnel to develop block leadership to help "sell" the project and to make suggestions on how to improve it; 4) sending to the Council those minutes and agendas of the Central Planning Board and the Newark Commission for Neighborhood Conservation and Rehabilitation (NCNCR) which pertain to Clinton Hill; 5) seeing that important communications between NCNCR and Clinton Hill Council be, where possible, in writing to the Council president or secretary to avoid misunderstanding and erroneous reports.

3. To date, the following actions and agreements have been reached on the above proposals: 1) Some sort of liaison committee will meet in the next two weeks. Who will be on it and what its powers will be are not known to me yet, but indications will be issued, apparently, by the NCNCR. 2) There will be an area-wide meeting open to all Clinton Hill residents at Clinton Place JHS on February 25, Thursday evening, 8 p.m., and you are all urged to attend. The Urban Renewal plan will be discussed then. 3) Block-

branches will meet with project officials, if the desire, after Mar. 7. At that time the Executive Committee will hold an initial and long-delayed meeting with the Field Director, Mr. Martin J. Bergen, to

- a) develop the best means of bringing the project to the branches and
- b) learning the scope of Mr. Bergen's responsibilities. If your block is interested in such a meeting in late March or after, please call Mrs. Geyer, Council secretary (BI @-2652) and give the date, place, and hour of your meeting. If any official can be present, you will be notified, else the month following will be designated. 4) The Council will receive from the NCMCR and the Central Planning Board those minutes which concern our neighborhood. Reports on the minutes will be made at Assembly and Block Leaders Committee meetings, or else through the Council newspaper. 5) Communications between the NCMCR and the Council are now being made in writing, although as occasion requires other means will be used.

4. The Council's Advisory Board (Mr. George Brennan, pres., Mr. Walter Pezda, sec'y) has asked the NCMCR to consider the appointment of a Clinton Hill representative to the NCMCR. This matter is now under consideration by the NCMCR. The Advisory Board will next meet on Feb. 24th when Mayor Carlin will be guest to discuss Urban Renewal. This meeting is by invitation because of limited space, but a full report will be made.

5. I am citing below the most important passages of a letter which I received recently from Mr. David Walker, Commissioner of the Urban Renewal Administration, Washington, D.C. I had written to Mr. Walker asking for a full explanation of the meaning of "citizen participation." Here are the important parts of his reply:

February 9, 1960

Dear Mr. Winters:

The role of community organization begins with the involvement of the citizenry at the earliest stage of planning and development of a program of rehabilitation and conservation. Effective mobilization of citizen participation is essential to successful neighborhood conservation.... Several cities have effectively involved citizens in the development and the carrying out of a city-wide blight prevention program. For example, Detroit. ...Citizen groups can be most effective in securing city-wide awareness, understanding and support for these programs, helping to coordinate the many activities involved, and providing advice and assistance on resolving specific questions.

To our knowledge there has been no injunction against the creation of a citizen-governmental liaison committee to take an active role in the planning process, the execution of the plans, or the orientation of the neighborhood.... There is nothing in the Federal regulations which would prevent officially designated agencies from working with or participating in such organizations.... One of the seven elements which a city must develop to attain the Workable Program is "Citizen Participation." The objective of this element is... "community-wide participation on the part of individuals and representative citizens organizations which will help to provide, both in the community generally and in selected areas, (continued next page)

the understanding and support which is necessary to insure ~~maximum~~ success."

Citizen participation is not limited to home improvement, but goes beyond to improvement of the environment and covers a wide range of interests which are essential to maintaining and improving a better neighborhood and better community. The organization of citizens can influence and should take the initiative in the developing of better neighborhoods, which are competitive with other city neighborhoods as good places to live, work, and rear families....

The Urban Renewal Program is administered on a regional basis. We suggest that you communicate with Mr. Chester H. Knowles, Housing and Home Finance Agency administrator of Region II, Room 1004, Widener Building, Chestnut and Juniper Street, Philadelphia 7, Pennsylvania. New Jersey is located in the Region II area.

If we can be of assistance with further information, we shall be happy to hear from you.

Sincerely yours,

David Walker
Urban Renewal Commissioner

6. I hope that you will keep this letter from Mr. Walker in mind in all meetings, both with Clinton Hill Council members and with city officials. It is the main authority we can secure for guidance on this vital matter of "citizen participation." I suggest the letter be read at a meeting and discussed, so everyone will be encouraged to raise questions about their own problems and to participate more fully in the work of our Council.

In closing, may I state how vital this whole plan is for our area? There won't be another one for us for a long time, I suspect, because if this works out, then other areas of the city will need such a program next. Therefore, we have to insure that this plan is the best possible one for us, that it is honestly and efficiently carried out, and that it embraces the broadest range of community problems (including a new school) that governmental and private action can solve. On our part, let us stay alert, keep informed, speak out, stick together, and build a stronger Clinton Hill Neighborhood Council.

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